

Adelphi

Sixty Years in the Ministry

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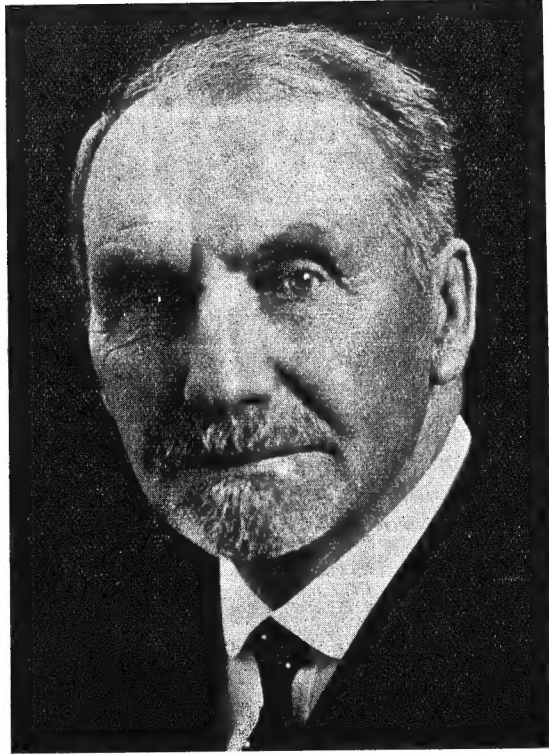
C. C. McTear

Foreword

● I COUNT it a real privilege to have been invited to write this brief preface to Dr. McLaurin's fine paper on "Sixty Years in the Ministry." I do so with the greater satisfaction, having been one of those who listened with intense interest and inspiration to its delivery by the Doctor himself at the Alberta Baptist Convention held in Red Deer last summer. I feel confident it will inspire and help all who are fortunate enough to secure a copy. It is a brief summary of a varied and truly remarkable ministry, remarkable for its length, for the health of the subject, for its spirit and its usefulness. There is a most lively story in it containing many interesting facts concerning Western Canada and the development of the Baptist enterprises therein. One thing in particular helped all those who were gathered to hear its first delivery, namely, the frank admission of certain failures. It takes a real person to do that and it is here that the Doctor will help his readers to face up to their own shortcomings and thus be better men. To read these paragraphs is to meet one of sound judgment, one who has grown steadily throughout the years until today his mind is more alert, his reading wider, his spirit more buoyant than ever, but most of all the reader will be sent back to the paramount task of the Christian—that of winning other people to be followers of Christ.

CHARLES G. STONE.

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Yours in Christian Service,
C. C. McLAURIN AND
MY DEPARTED
HELPER.



Sixty Years in the Ministry

Am not just sure what I am expected to say upon this theme. I must of necessity speak about myself, which is not always a pleasant thing to do. Only a few things of the sixty years can be mentioned. What I have to say will be:

First—what especially helped me.

Second—What gave me special satisfaction.

Third—Wherein was there failure.

First: What helped me to be in any measure useful as a Minister of the Gospel?

(a) The foundation of my ministerial career was laid in a Christian home. Family prayers, where I was religiously impressed and instructed. I learned there is a God; Heaven; Hell; the meaning of good and bad; a conception of sin. I learned to fear God; to revere the Bible; to keep the Sabbath. God and religion were realities—as real as father or home or food. The fact that God watched over me constantly; observed my conduct; heard my every word; knew my thoughts; was pleased or displeased with my actions. All were as real as that I existed. Home counsel, conversation and example compelled me to think seriously of this life and of that which is to come.

(b) Again, the church to which we always walked two miles distant surrounded my young life with influences that warned me against evil associates and practices. A faithful pastor, who so preached that even a child could be profited and interested, who spoke personally to me of my relationship to God. His sermons talked of sin; the need for immediate repentance; the danger of delay; the wonderful Saviour who gave His life to save me. I am thankful these great questions were impressed upon my very young and impressionable mind.

The Sunday school had for its one text-book the Bible. No lesson leaves or teacher's guide. The teachers were interested in my spiritual welfare, Sundays and week-days. One teacher followed me closely until I became a Christian. For the church members and deacons I had profound respect and often wished to be good like them.

(c) The third help that I would mention relates to my conversion to God, when about fourteen years old. I had always desired to be a Christian but conviction of guilt and a desire to escape from the consequences of my sin were not mine until a few years before I received forgiveness. I

had seasons of great distress; I certainly was under a conviction of my sin. Relief came when I understood the truth that Christ died to TAKE AWAY MY SIN, to provide a means of forgiveness and reconciliation to God. When I trusted Him who died on the cross for me, I was at peace. It was a vital, definite experience. It was this experience that compelled me to enter the ministry and without it I would have been useless as a preacher.

(d) Wonderful help came to me from the College at Woodstock, under Rev. Dr. R. A. Fyfe, where I obtained training for my life-work. It never professed to make scholars; its object was to make effective preachers of the word of God. The whole trend of the school was spiritual in a high degree. Dr. Fyfe was a man of mental strength, but his spiritual power was dominant. The most impressive Gospel appeals I ever heard were Dr. Fyfe's talks from the rostrum of the College chapel, as he spoke to the students (who were a mixed company) of the necessity for repentance and immediate reconciliation with God. He ever urged upon us as ministerial students that to win souls to Christ was to be the one purpose of our ministry. His plain common sense, practical talks to us in Pastoral theology have helped at every turn. I would have made many more blunders but for his advice regarding our relationship to our people.

In that same school Dr. John Crawford, Dr. John Torrance, J. C. Yale, J. E. Wells, S. J. McKee were men to whom I owe much. All views of doctrine, false and true, were discussed, but the false was exposed and opposed and the true was brought out and taught in the clearest and most positive fashion. I was helped to reason through to the truth. I needed the help.

(e) My fifth help in the ministry, during the 60 years that I would mention, was the good wife, who was a real helpmeet for 48 happy years. I cannot express with words the credit that is due to her for any success that attended my ministry. She was a noble woman, with rare common sense, intelligence, good judgment and well equipped mind; always alert, quick to discern an error in a life or a sermon. A fair but an outspoken critic from which her husband's preaching was not spared. She was from a Welsh home, where every sermon was analysed in the home after church, though in the most kindly spirit. She was devoted to Christ and His work. Her interests in Missions were supreme. Though her home and family were never neglected, she always found a way to reach the church service and Mission circle. She was hospitable; her home was always open to visitors and strangers. She loved company. She wanted

her children to meet leaders of our denomination that they might hear their conversation and discussion in our home. They were always welcome at meal time or bed time. Our first humble home had a chamber for strangers and so did every home we established. She never complained of being imposed upon; never considered any task a hardship. Frequently for a month or more she lived alone, when my duties as Superintendent demanded my absence. She never murmured. Always interested in the work of the church and conventions. My right arm was removed when she was taken. I am glad to have this opportunity to give this testimony.

(f) The sixth help for which I am ever thankful has been my good health. It has been a valuable asset. During the sixty years since my ordination and five years of student preaching. I have not been in bed one week from illness. Only seven Sundays during those 65 years was I unable to be in my pulpit from any temporary ailment; three of those were because of a serious operation in Mayo's Clinic. Though for years I preached three times and taught two Bible classes each Sunday and often at other times had long journeys between services, I never Sunday night said, "I am tired" or "I am all in." I never had a sleepless Sunday night or a blue Monday. Monday was always my best day. From then on the burden grew until I was relieved on Sunday night. Perhaps all this is not to my credit, but it is a frank admission. During seven years I was Assistant Superintendent, travelling over the three Prairie Provinces; I was on the road most of the time; much of the travel was not in railway coaches and many discomforts were endured. The greatest hardships give me now the greatest pleasure, and at the time were most interesting. Their uncertainty afforded a peculiar pleasure. I am grateful that power of endurance was mine—a gift from God.

(g) Seventh help I mention was to me the greatest help from any human source. The churches I served, the Mission Board and missionaries always gave me such whole-hearted support, it would have been a disgrace if I had not been of service. I was pastor of four churches in Ontario during twenty-one years and four years in Manitoba. Then for nearly twenty-five years I was Superintendent of Missions. In every church where I served as pastor, I had most hearty co-operation from Godly men and women, who always treated me kindly and with consideration. My salary was never a week delayed. I never lost a Sunday between pastorates; in fact, have not known a day's unemployment since graduation from college. I never had a church quarrel or even a jangle. Serious differences of opinion have arisen

but differences were agreeably adjusted. Patience, keeping my mouth shut and advising others to do so. When necessary, doing it quietly and kindly works wonders in the leadership of a church. If a pastor cannot control his own temper, he cannot control a church. In one case the deacons requested me to resign. At first it hurt; then I decided they considered it their duty or never would have done such a hard thing. We parted good friends. Each deacon has been a personal friend ever since. It was their privilege. I have avoided being the cause of a division in a church. The pastor that allows it, suffers loss that he cannot regain for some time. A church is always more important than a man. The church must stay and should be left united. A pastor can go and he has a large world in which to work. I have found that the best people are in the church. There is not an individual or family of all my acquaintance during those years but who greet me as a friend and into whose home I would be made welcome.

(h) Another help I found in the criticisms that reached me from time to time. How well I remember a good white-haired deacon, old enough to be my grandfather, taking me aside and warning me against a scolding habit I was forming. He said: "Scolding never does any good; when you talk to us about our failings before the whole congregation, it just makes it harder to do what you want us to do." I had been only a few months in the ministry. I went alone and thought about it; had a cry and then prayed for help and never scolded again. To this day gratitude for that good deacon wells up in my heart. Neighboring pastors and fellow-students who heard me preach and give an address pointed out weaknesses, mannerisms that should be guarded against. For all such criticism I was then and am now thankful. Sometimes I have been harshly criticised by some who cared little for me, or possibly wanted to hurt me. For these I have ever been thankful. Never did I manifest any resentment of such people. They were likely more sincere in what they said than were others who gave expression of praise and admiration. Therefore take all criticism as Divine Providence. Profit by it; think it over; examine yourself and make sure whether you have deserved it or not. To have a wife, who can detect an error and constructively act as a critic, is to have a real help.

With all these helps I ought to have been more useful in the Kingdom.

Second: What gave me special satisfaction as a Minister?

First, and very much first—To see a soul won for Christ; a sinner rejoicing in a Saviour, through means of a sermon, or pastoral visit or through any activity of the church has always been the most thrilling experience of my life. I never can forget the inexpressible joy I experienced the first time a report reached me that a certain person had been saved through a sermon I had preached. During revival seasons, in which I participated on several occasions, my feelings of gladness corresponded with the "joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth." Nothing in all the world gives such satisfaction. It enables one to form an idea of what Jesus experienced when He said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." He had just seen a sinful woman saved. Henry Ward Beecher tells that at one time, after he had been preaching eloquently for years to popular audiences, one night something compelled him to cast aside his carefully prepared sermon and he poured out his soul in an appeal to the people to repent and seek Christ. When more than one person at the close came seeking relief and finding the Saviour, he said, "I never preached until that night." Christ's commission is "Preach the Gospel"; "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." That makes plain the purpose of preaching. To be told "That was a fine (or wonderful) sermon" may be simple flattery and anyway gives little satisfaction. During my life, when preaching or giving an exposition of Biblical truth, I had a sense of God's approval. Occasionally I was tempted to announce a sensational topic, which to my surprise brought a crowd. When they discovered that I had in my display windows what I did not have in my shop, they did not come again. It requires a genius to hold an audience by eloquence, learning or sensation. Few of us are equal to it. But if you give the Bread of Life, from that inexhaustible supply, the hungry will come. There are millions hungry but they do not know that what you have will satisfy that hunger.

Pastoral visitations have supplied me most of these years one of the pleasures of my life. It was not always so. When a young minister, it was a hardship to go into homes to which I had not been invited; but duty bid me go. Often I would pass a door two or three times in an afternoon, making an effort each time to overcome my timidity, but my courage failed me and I passed and repassed without knocking at the door. I would reason: perhaps they do not want me. Then I would wonder: what can I say if I do go in, etc., etc. But I became convinced that I could not preach effectively to people whom I did not know. Eventually I conquered all timidity in visiting homes, any home, to bring to them some spiritual help and become acquainted so that

I could further help became the pleasure of nearly every afternoon and in the country of a forenoon and evening too. Only twice was I ordered out of a home, and then later my presence was desired. Often a cold reception was followed by a most hearty welcome. Often in the home I have been able to reach fathers and mothers and children with the Gospel whom I could not have reached from the pulpit. A pastor who has pleasure in going from home to home, in the right spirit and with the right purpose, using good judgment in the approach, is a gift that can be and ought to be developed in every pastor.

Third: I found it wonderfully exhilarating to watch the growth of Christian character in the membership; to see young men, sometimes boys, come to Christ—hear them pray publicly for the first time—hear them speak for the Master and begin some simple service with the church and watch them grow into useful, helpful Christians—men and women. Some of them became useful Ministers of the Gospel. All this made me feel it is abundantly worth while to be a preacher, a pastor in even what is thought to be an ordinary church. There is no calling in the world equal to the Ministry by which one can enrich the world. To be the means of developing one real Christian man out of the sinful material this world supplies is more than to make a million dollars. The dollars will be burned up but the Christian man will live for ever to the glory of God.

Fourth: To witness the growth of the Christian church during these sixty years make me appreciate the privilege of living and working with many who have been instrumental in bringing it about. At present I think only of our own denomination. Ontario and Quebec Conventions had, at the beginning of my ministry, about 10,000 members; today, about 60,000 members. Our Foreign Mission was just opened in India, with one missionary and his wife and about twenty-five converts. Today, 23,000 church members; 200 churches, schools, colleges, hospitals, leper homes. I have watched them grow. Bolivia Mission came into existence twenty years after my ordination, and grew to its present proportions. McMaster University came into existence and developed to present proportions since I entered the ministry. Manitoba Mission, as Western Mission was called at its inception, was proposed, organized and developed since I began to preach. The coming of Pioneer McDonald to Manitoba and the organization of the Winnipeg church of seven members were events recorded just as I was entering my life-work. I have spent just about seven years as Assistant Superintendent in the three provinces and Superintendent of Alberta seventeen years. For the last fourteen

years I have been a semi-retired preacher, an emergency pastor, an evangelist, missionary, eastern representative and a general-purpose-handy-man. They have been the busiest years of my life.

While Superintendent, I travelled as a kind of Field Secretary in looking up new settlements; finding possible opportunities of organizing a church or an opening for a student missionary. When appointed to that task in 1901, at a salary of \$200 less than I had been receiving as a pastor, it appealed to me as an opportunity of doing the kind of work that was to my liking. The country was new; transportation was difficult—only one trans-continental railway and a few branches. No roads; only trails; no motor cars; new settlers to the number of 200,000 in a year spreading over this great area. To work for Christ among these great crowds, many living in shacks on farms and in new towns—people from nearly every nation of the world, was an opportunity angels might covet. I had the joy of presiding at the organization of over seventy-five churches, many of them gathered after several visits of shorter or longer periods. To many sections I was the first Baptist missionary to visit, to be seen or heard. Many promising beginnings have failed to continue; many small beginnings have developed into strong churches. Among the churches are: Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Estevan, Weyburn, North Battleford, Wetaskiwin, Red Deer, Ponoka, Bright View, Lacombe, Clive, Grande Prairie, Peace River, and others. I never cease praising my Master and expressing my appreciation to the Conventions in giving me the privilege I have had of serving under such favorable and inviting conditions.

In 1901, when I entered the Superintendency, we had seventy-five churches in the Manitoba and North West Conventions and 4210 members. In British Columbia there were eighteen churches and 1500 members. Today we have in our four provinces over 200 churches and nearly 21,000 church members. It has been a great satisfaction to have had a part in the development of Baptist churches in Western Canada during the past forty years. Brandon College had its beginning after I was twenty years a pastor.

Fourth: One of my pleasantest experiences has been my association with a large number of my brethren. There are only about a dozen churches in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia into which I have not entered and spoken while in the ministry. I have also found it helpful to myself and my church, when a pastor, to cultivate neighborliness with brother pastors.

Exchange always proved enrichment to all parties concerned. To belong to this noble band of consecrated men meant more to me than connection with any fraternal organization. I always made it a rule to meet with them as often as possible. In sixty years and more I never missed attending the Convention and the Association. Sometimes it was difficult to secure money but the investment brought rich returns.

Third: My third observation is, wherein I have failed.

First: I was not as faithful a student of my Bible as I should have been. I believe my strength as a preacher could be measured by my acquaintance with the word of God. Had I my life to live over again, when young and memory tenacious, I would read and re-read that book from Genesis to Revelations until every chapter would be as familiar as John 3 or Rom. 5. I have read that book through since January 1st this year. Had I done so every three months of my early life, am sure I would have been a more effective preacher. I have too often been gathering only gold-dust when I could have had nuggets from the same mine, which would have enriched my mind and soul and sermons. It gives a speaker a peculiar power to be able to quote Scripture freely and correctly. Because I have recognized this failure in my ministry, I constantly advise young Christians and particularly young ministers to become familiar with every book and chapter of the English Bible. From that book you can secure a better knowledge of God and of man than from all books of history, science and philosophy, if piled sky high. Secure this knowledge yourself, first hand from the Book, is my advice to every brother in the ministry.

Second: I have not been an omnivorous reader of books. From that I have suffered loss. My life-work did not offer me a large opportunity for reading. As a pastor I had much outside work. As Superintendent, much of my time was spent travelling. Am sure I was the loser. Reading gives not only ideas and suggestions and illustrations, but words. A limited vocabulary is a handicap. As a boy I was a reader of books, but as a minister I read in order to prepare sermons. To be widely informed in literature is a source of strength to a preacher. In this I failed and have deeply regretted it. So I say to every young preacher, use every spare moment you have reading good, informing, inspirational books.

Third: My chief failure, I must admit, has been that I have not always lived in close fellowship with God. It is

easy to fall into a habit of being so busy doing God's work that you neglect God and when you do, you fail in doing His work. Not having lived in fellowship with God more constantly, I have not known Him sufficiently to be able to talk about and talk to Him and thus recommend Him. To miss that "little talk with Jesus"; to allow that fellowship of the Spirit to be substituted by fellowship even with good men; to substitute communion with saints for communion with the Father, is to invite failure in your ministry. Because I was guilty, many of my sermons were without fervor or power. I am sure that I have failed more generally in praying, real praying, than in anything else that I have tried to do as a Christian minister. Without the power secured from vital contact with God, we are useless. An engine without the power born of fire is just a pile of dead metal and thus is useless. I have often wondered at myself, knowing as I did that all my life I had access to an unlimited supply of ammunition of heaven and have used so little of it. It is because I do know something of this intimacy with God, that I so clearly discern my failure. Failure here is a serious matter.

In conclusion, I must say notwithstanding all my failures, my sixty years' ministry have been like one delightful song. The years have gone all too quickly. I love preaching as much as at any time in my life and believe I can preach better as I grow older. My physical strength remains; my memory has not decayed; my interest in God's work and word never was more intense and if I have my way, I shall continue in the active ministry for the next twenty years. So help me God

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